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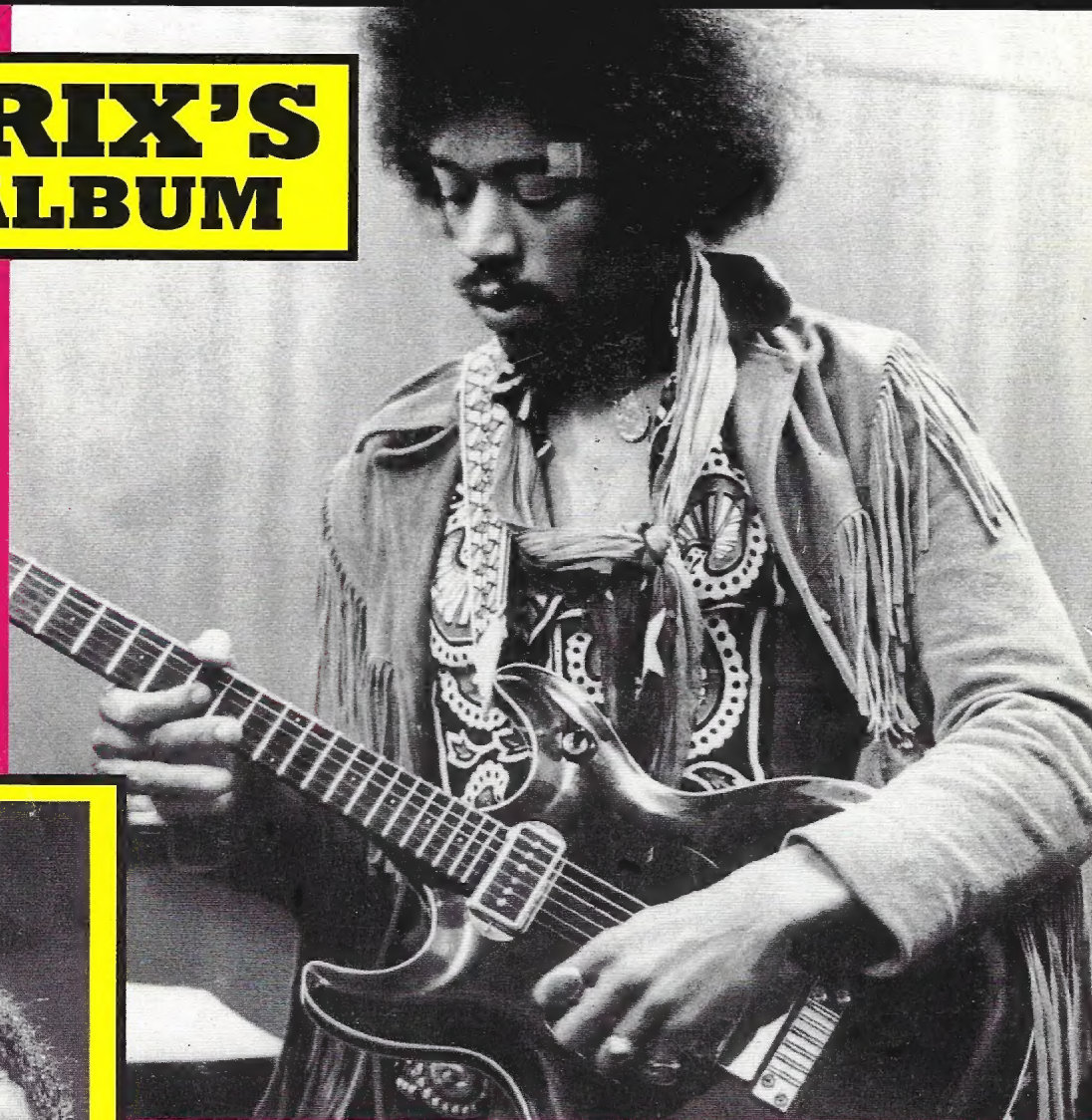
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# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO JIMI HENDRIX'S FINAL ALBUM?

BEFORE HE DIED IN 1970, THE GUITARIST HAD SPENT TWO YEARS WORKING ON A FOLLOW-UP TO "ELECTRIC LADYLAND". IT WAS NEVER COMPLETED. NOW "VOODOO SOUP", ISSUED THIS MONTH, IS INTENDED TO PLUG THE GAP.

MARK PAYTRESS DISCOVERS WHY IT TOOK SO LONG



Once, it was all quite simple. In March 1971, six months after Hendrix's death, "The Cry Of Love" appeared. It was, so his producers said, the album he'd been close to completing when he died. Then came "Rainbow Bridge" in October 1971, with more finished studio out-takes. And then, a year later, "War Heroes". February 1974's "Loose Ends" seemed to be scraping the barrel a bit, but that was compensated by the revelation that Jimi's final project was actually something called "Black Gold". Then someone trawled through the cuttings and discovered countless mentions of "The First Rays Of The New Rising Sun".

What was Jimi Hendrix up to during the last two years of his life? And why couldn't he deliver any of the grand projects he had in mind? Historians have established that "First Rays" was his abiding passion from 1968 till his death in 1970. Alan Douglas, who's been responsible for overseeing Hendrix's posthumous career, has long been promising to recreate what would have been Jimi's fourth studio album. Back in March 1994, he told *ICE* magazine: "The album that I was working on with Jimi when he died was 'First Ray Of The New Rising Sun', which was a double LP. I have Jimi's own track listing for it, and originally I was going to release the album just the way he wrote it out. But as I look at it, I'm sure he would have changed it 14 times before it was released."

Which is partly why it's been retitled as (gulp) "Voodoo Soup". It doesn't pretend to be "First Rays", but it's clearly intended as the definitive companion to Hendrix's three *bona fide* studio LPs, gathering the cream of those posthumous sets. But even leaving aside the contentious issue of what's been omitted, "Voodoo Soup" is still not without its problems.

Three previously unissued takes of "The New Rising Sun", "Message To Love" and "Peace In Mississippi" are proudly paraded. The first is actually a variant of a piece that first appeared in the "Rainbow Bridge" film, the second an enlarged version of the take on 1975's "Crash Landing", while "Peace" reinstates the original drum and bass parts which were removed on that same LP.

The other material, which is already familiar to fans after years of carefree plundering of the archive, has undergone minor cosmetic alterations through remixing and editing. Those who delighted in the false fade-out on "Ezy Rider" on "The Cry Of Love" will be disappointed to find that it's no longer there, but on the plus side, at least 30 seconds are reinstated on "Midnight", which first appeared on "War Heroes". "Pali Gap", which once lay insignificantly in the middle of the first side of "Rainbow Bridge", now shines like a jewel, acquiring an appropriate lushness that was largely missing first time round.

It's a disparate album, but then there are at least four different line-ups featured, and at least as many musical styles. Douglas has compiled the set with playability foremost in his mind, creating one or two interesting segues and juxtapositions in the process. If "Voodoo Soup" is stylistically and thematically muddled, then that's not surprising, given the nature of the raw material.

During the last two years of his life, all the certainties that had taken Jimi Hendrix to the top of his profession crumbled away. Beset by seemingly insurmountable problems — managerial, musical, political and spiritual — he took refuge in the recording studio, jamming at every available moment and leaving a huge legacy of largely unfinished work. Much of this material (which has now surfaced on bootleg) indicates that Hendrix was suffering a prolonged bout of artistic self-doubt: whether this had anything to do with his early death will never be known, but the signs of an impending tragedy are obviously there, as this chronological unfolding of Hendrix's artistic fracture reveals.

## LATE 1968 – SPRING 1969

### EXPERIENCING THE BLUES

Shortly after the release of "Electric Ladyland", in October 1968, the future of the Jimi Hendrix Experience was in doubt. The leader of rock's biggest-grossing live act, whose new record attracted high praise from critics, was dissatisfied. His audiences still wanted to see his guitar engulfed in flames, and watch him feigning cunnilingus during "Wild Thing"; his management couldn't book the band into gruelling yet lucrative concert tours quick enough; and his lieutenants, Noel Redding and Mitch Mitchell, were getting mutinous.

The seeds of discontent were apparent during the making of "Ladyland" earlier that year. Outraged by excessive time-wasting, Jimi's original mentor/producer Chas Chandler had quit midway through the sessions. It's true: the studio would be littered with guest musicians and stoned hangers-on, creating the kind of party atmosphere sampled at the end of "Voodoo Chile". But this wasn't solely in the pursuit of hedonism: Hendrix was bringing his looser-fitting musical ideas in line with his lifestyle, breaking down the barriers between art and real life. For Chas, who'd been schooled in a more businesslike approach ("you've got 20 minutes to record 'House Of The Rising Sun' and count yourself lucky, lad!"), it was all too much.

Buddy Miles, Jack Casady, Steve Winwood and Al Kooper all became part of a floating line-up, as Hendrix — bored with the limitations of a three-piece power trio — sought to explore new musical vistas. To this aim, he also began to take greater interest in the production side of his work, joining engineer Eddie Kramer in the control-room as they concocted rich landscapes of sound.

The key recording was the suite of songs on side three: "Rainy Day, Dream Away"/"1983 . . . (A Merman I Should Turn To Be)"/"Moon, Turn The Tides . . . Gently Gently Away". Across this side, Hendrix anticipated the way that hip-hop, rap and ambient would treat the mixing-process as being at least as important as the raw instrumentation.

*"Jimi was trying too hard to be experimental, but he was so out of it he changed his mind every other second, not even knowing when he had it right."* (Noel Redding)



*Jimi Hendrix left a wealth of recordings in the vaults, but no definite instructions as to what to do with them. Record companies continue to plunder the tapes, though, to meet demand.*

**"Hendrix seemed to play better when there were certain restrictions placed upon him. With Chas, he fought to modify his boundaries. When he had carte blanche, he would often doodle."**

(Eddie Kramer)

Drugs were obviously important: without the mass production of psychedelics, from the mid-60s onwards, the course of popular music would have looked quite different. And one new song, "Room Full Of Mirrors", first taped at the end of the "Ladyland" sessions in August 1968, was Jimi's way of encapsulating a central feature of the acid trip: the way one's 'wholeness' of self dissolves into shattered fragments. Increasingly, this 'ego dispersal' was mirrored by a musical impotence, where dozens of possibilities were available to him, and yet none presented itself unequivocally as *the right way forward*.

When the Experience entered the TTG Studios for several days' work in late October 1968, taping three new songs — "The New Rising Sun", "Peace In Mississippi" and "Look Over Yonder" — as the first stirrings of a possible fourth LP, only "Yonder" was completed to Jimi's satisfaction (which makes its absence on "Voodoo Soup" somewhat mystifying).

The other pair do appear on "Voodoo Soup". "Peace", a thunderous instrumental variation

on "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)", is stunning, even if it only retreads familiar territory. The key cut is "The New Rising Sun", an instrumental forerunner to "Hey Baby (The Land Of The New Rising Sun)" from "Rainbow Bridge". Jimi returned to the song several times during his life, and it's likely that this recording — given a full-blown treatment — was to have been the centrepiece of the "First Rays Of The New Rising Sun" project that he kept returning to during the last two years of his life.

The "Hey Baby" lyric version reads like Paul Kantner's Jefferson Starship philosophy in reverse: instead of a rocket-full of hippies taking off to some far-flung Utopia, Hendrix envisages a "gypsy baby" descending from the land of the new rising sun, intent on spreading "a lot of love around to everybody/A whole lot of peace of mind to you and you". As Hendrix's world became increasingly complex during the months ahead, he took solace in this enduring, spirit-of-'67 vibe.

"The New Rising Sun" featured on "Voodoo Soup" is instrumental, and sounds like a typical prelude for a conceptual album. Featuring Hendrix alone on guitar and overdubbed drums, this short track is a close relative of the "1983" suite by virtue of its wash of backing tapes, phasing and assorted studio effects.

Bored with the three-piece Experience, he ended the October '68 sessions on the 29th jamming around "Red House" with Buddy Miles (drums) and Lee Michaels (organ). "I'd like to present to you the Electric Church," he says, before introducing the players. It was a sign of things to come.

After completing a winter U.S. tour, Noel Redding returned to the U.K., Mitch Mitchell



mused on a solo venture and Hendrix spent a relatively quiet December, at the end of which he was voted 'Artist Of The Year' by 'Billboard' magazine.

No doubt with many misgivings, the Experience resurfaced in February 1969 for some high-powered London concerts at the Royal Albert Hall, followed by tours in Europe and America which climaxed with Noel Redding walking out of the band at the end of June. It was neither a surprise, nor, for Jimi, a problem. Finding little creative outlet with Jimi at the helm, Redding had formed his own band, Fat Mattress, at the end of '68, and they'd provided the support at the '69 shows. At the end of the day, it was money which had kept the group together since the New Year: creatively, Jimi was already thinking far and beyond the confines of the three-piece Jimi Hendrix Experience.

## 1969

### FIRST SIGHT OF THE FIRST RAYS

Before the New Year was four days old, Hendrix outlined his plans for two LPs, "Little Band Of Gypsies" and "First Rays Of The New Rising Sun", to the BBC's Tony Norman. He was already aware that the first of those albums would be nothing more than a way of settling a dispute over his original 1965 contract. But he became uncharacteristically impassioned when discussing "First Rays".

"When I was in America, I went through periods of deep depression seeing the way the country was becoming split strictly in half. Their life is based on material things. The dollar is their God. The people are like pelicans who all think the same. There is no such thing as a colour problem. It is a weapon for the negative forces who are trying to destroy the country." Then he became near-messianic. "The Americans are looking for a leader in their music. 'First Rays Of The New Rising Sun' will be about what we have seen."

A month later, he reiterated the two-album idea, with "First Rays" unveiling "what I've found out. I am going to get all these words together in nice, heavy songs. Very straightforward songs." And later that spring, he told 'International Times' that he'd been



Photographs of Hendrix during the final months of his life tell their own story. The weight of stardom, with all its demands, and the creative burdens he carried had aged him considerably.

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working on "a really nice piece of music that I'm getting together for this late-summer LP that I'd like to do with this cat named Al Brown, in America". This collaboration was still on the cards towards the end of the year, this time as a guitar concerto, backed by an entire orchestra conducted by Al (a close friend of Jimi's sometime girlfriend Devon).

## 1969

### GYPSY SONS AND RAINBOWS

While "First Rays" occupied Jimi's innermost thoughts, two more practical matters had to be resolved. Firstly, he needed to rethink how he was going to present what he was now describing as 'Electric/Sky Church Music'. And secondly, plans for the construction of his own recording studio got underway in February 1969, when his manager Mike Jeffery obtained an advance from Reprise against future royalties. At Electric Lady, Hendrix would be able to maintain his prolific recording habit without incurring

the \$60,000-plus bills that arrived during the making of "Ladyland". And, of course, he'd be free to "doodle" (Eddie Kramer) as often as he liked.

That studio wouldn't be ready for at least a year, however. In the meantime, he'd have to continue working at the Record Plant, New York where, in March 1969, he recorded "Star-Spangled Banner" using the new 24-track facilities. Kramer insists this was never intended for a forthcoming LP, although it eventually surfaced posthumously on "Rainbow Bridge". Compared with the violently-charged version performed at the Woodstock Festival, though, this studio concoction was little more than an exercise in multi-tracking.

There were a couple more sessions with Noel and Mitch, at Olympic in February, and at the Record Plant in April (where the trio unspectacularly revamped "Stone Free", and taped the punishing "Midnight", now on "Voodoo Soup"), but this was merely a distraction from touring.

More indicative of future plans were Jimi's April sessions at the eight-track Olmstead Sound Studios as part of an all-black trio with

drummer Buddy Miles and his bassist Billy Rich. Re-engaging with black musicians worked on at least two levels: Hendrix was increasingly sensitive to being called an 'Uncle Tom' (a black plaything for white audiences), particularly in the wake of growing civil unrest in the States. And there was a clear indication that he'd become dissatisfied with full-blown psychedelic rock. "Things were getting too pretentious, too complicated," he complained. "Stone Free" — you know that? That's much simpler. That's blues and rock and whatever else happens." In the ascendancy were bands like Santana and Sly & The Family Stone, both harnessing psychedelic trappings with stricter rhythmic lines, both creating a huge sound with a full stage of musicians.

Even before the Experience completed its U.S. tour, Hendrix had advised an old friend from his Army days, bassist Billy Cox, that he would soon be needing him. That there was dead wood around to be discarded was the suggestion behind his comment in May that the new album might be called "The End Of The Beginning". As it turned out, Noel's departure at the end of June prompted a clean slate (of sorts), especially as the release of the "Smash Hits" compilation that month temporarily kept the record company at bay.

In discussing Hendrix's aspirations, biographer Harry Shapiro makes an analogy between Jimi and space-jazz improvising guru Sun Ra, whose commitment to music and cosmic spiritualities governed his band, the Arkestra. Steeped in 60s counter-culture, Hendrix was far less authoritarian, and as a major star, his freedom was partially hindered by obligations to his audience. However, by mid-'69, he was confident enough to begin experimenting with an expanded line-up to create his new 'Sky Church Music'.

## BOISEVILLE

Hendrix followed the likes of Dylan and the Band into upstate New York, to Boiseville in the Woodstock suburbs, near a village called Shokan. There, in a far more relaxed setting, he was joined by Billy Cox and Mitch Mitchell, percussionists Jerry Velez and Juma Sultan, and second guitarist Larry Lee. Several weeks' jamming yielded a few new songs, including the R&B-based "Izabella", "Power Of Soul" and "Message To Love" (the latter first taped with an assemblage of non-Experience musicians in March) and Mitch's hard-riffing instrumental, "Jam Back At The House". Some of these were performed (alongside several jams) by the newly-constituted Gypsy Sons And Rainbows band at Woodstock in August, though one new track, "Machine Gun", remained unheard publicly.

That same month, Hendrix informed Ritchie Yorke that, "We have about forty songs in the works, about half of them completed. A lot of it comprises jams — all spiritual stuff, all very earthy." But within a month, after Gypsy Sons And Rainbows had premiered "Machine Gun" on the 'Dick Cavett Show', and performed in Greenwich Village and Harlem, Larry Lee returned to Memphis, and Juma Sultan and Jerry Velez were told by Jimi that he was halting the project for a while. Producer Eddie Kramer has suggested that Hendrix was unable to write suitable material for the new group, although with only a poorly mixed live set at Woodstock to judge from, this judgement seems a mite premature.

Sun Ra could work with a dozen or more musicians because of a highly disciplined regime. Jimi, an inveterate jammer in

desperate search of new musical ideas, was happy to let things canter idly during the summer. But there came a time when even he wanted to create something tangible from the weeks of unbridled blowing.

## LATE 1969 - EARLY 1970

### BAND OF GYPSYS

Although he'd met Alan Douglas earlier in the year, Jimi's first real musical encounter with the producer took place in October, when — together with Buddy Miles — he guested on two Douglas projects: the Last Poets' proto-rap "Doriella Du Fontaine" (belatedly issued on 12" in '84) and an album by America's Minister For Acid, Dr. Timothy Leary.

Douglas, with his background in free jazz, probably wasn't the perfect person to supervise the four Band Of Gypsies sessions which took place during November. Eddie Kramer maintains that no finished masters date from this period, even though several recordings from this time have since been released.

The relative dearth of material is some-

what surprising, bearing in mind that Jimi's companions were both rock-solid rhythm players — drummer Buddy Miles and bassist Billy Cox. However, the basic tracks for the "Izabella"/"Stepping Stone" single (Reprise 0905), issued briefly in the U.S. the following April, "Room Full Of Mirrors", "Ezy Rider" and "Earth Blues" (the latter with Steve Winwood and Chris Wood on backing vocals) all date from this time. And all bar "Izabella" and "Earth Blues" are now available on "Voodoo Soup".

Manager Mike Jeffery wasn't at all happy with the line-up, which he thought would alienate Hendrix from his predominantly white audience; or the fact that Douglas was involved in the recording sessions. But at least the announcement of four Band Of Gypsies shows at the Fillmore East over the New Year period gave Jimi a chance to fulfil his legal obligation to Ed Chalpin, who was still awaiting an album of new material.

The Band Of Gypsies were barely more permanent than Gypsy Sons and Rainbows, for after a disastrous two-song show at Madison Square Garden at the end of January (where Jimi was too wasted to perform more than



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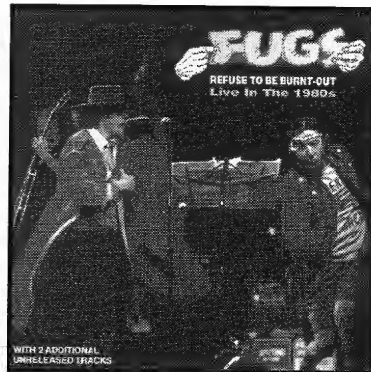
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*To further complicate matters, Hendrix felt constrained by the incendiary cultural climate of the late-60s. His hippie hedonism was increasingly tempered by a growing political awareness.*

two songs), Buddy Miles got his cards. But the "Band Of Gypsies" album, issued in April 1970, enshrines this short episode in Hendrix's career. It's a controversial record which contains one side of fairly unexceptional soul material (including the good-vibey "Power Of Soul" and "Message To Love"), and another which started with a dire jam ("Who Knows") and ended with a dramatic and often breathtaking "Machine Gun".

Even before "Band Of Gypsies" hit the shops to a mixed response, Mike Jeffery was intent on reviving Jimi's career, to the point that, on 4th February 1970, he announced the reformation of the Jimi Hendrix Experience. Mitch and Noel were flown over to the States for a high-profile 'Rolling Stone' interview, while Jimi was reminded of the four albums he still owed Reprise, the \$250,000 advance for the Electric Lady studios and (his great fear) unpaid tax bills. Hendrix's flight from real life, headlong into musical and pharmaceutical escape, could never hope to be permanent. It was time to hit the road again.

## 1970

### THERE MUST BE SOME KINDA WAY OUTTA HERE...

The Experience, in its original form, was never seriously going to be reborn. Noel Redding's colourful bass runs and barely concealed musical ambitions didn't fit into Jimi's scenario at all. Meanwhile, Mitch Mitchell returned to join bassist Billy Cox, despite rumours that Jefferson Airplane's Jack Casady was being considered in March. That month, the new trio recorded two songs, "Midnight Lightnin'" and "Bleeding Heart".

In a moment, things seemed to be happening all around him — the Electric Lady studios were nearing completion; Jeffery had signed a contract for Jimi's participation in a film, 'Rainbow Bridge'; "Band Of Gypsies" was due

for release; and the 'Cry Of Love' tour, due to start on 25th April at the L.A. Forum, would keep the band busy until the end of July. Hendrix was publicly enthusiastic, but privately ambivalent about this new bout of activity.

Judging by the wealth of bootleg recordings which survive, the early 'Cry Of Love' dates were as dynamic as any live sets he'd played since 1968. But his cocooned existence, with its desperate search for meaning beyond the immediacy of musical, sexual or drug highs, continued to plague Hendrix. In "Belly Button Window", written in March and now available again on "Voodoo Soup", he wrote: "Well I'm up here in this womb/I'm lookin' all around . . . I'll be glad to go back to Spirit Land". There was also evidence of encroaching paranoia: "And I'm wondering if they don't want me around . . . 'Cause I ain't coming down this way too much more again".

As the tour rolled on, Hendrix became increasingly bad-tempered and bored at gigs, as was clearly evident when the trio played the Isle Of Wight Festival in August as part of an ill-fated European festival tour. His new songs — "Room Full Of Mirrors", "Hey Baby (Land Of The New Rising Sun)", "Freedom", "Midnight Lightning", "Message To Love" — didn't always go down well, and this didn't always inspire Jimi to perform them with total enthusiasm.

As the U.S. dates wound down towards the end of June, Hendrix jotted down a list of songs nearing completion for the long-overdue new studio album. Songs listed were "Ezy Rider"/"Room Full Of Mirrors"/"Earth Blues Today"/"Have You Heard"/"Freedom"/"Stepping Stone"/"Izabella" ("new mix needed")/"Astro Man"/"Night Bird Flying". Also listed, but with question marks, were "Drifter's Escape" and "Burning Desire". There was also an instruction to get a tape of an old B-side, "Highway Chile", a forerunner to the boho existence epitomised on "Ezy Rider".

## ELECTRIC LADY

On July 1st/2nd Jimi worked at the Electric Lady Studios, using the full facilities for the first time. One of the three songs taped during the sessions was "Hey Baby", now pitched somewhere between "First Rays Of The New Rising Sun" and "Land Of The New Rising Sun". It wasn't too far from completion (though Jimi's "is the microphone on?" wouldn't have stayed on any final mix), but more so than with any of his final recordings, "Hey Baby" seemed finally to realise the kind of spiritually uplifting, cosmologically inclined progressive soul music to which he'd aspired. Odd then, that this version doesn't appear on "Voodoo Soup": its obvious position would have been at the end of the set, as a fully-fledged resolution to the opening instrumental, "The New Rising Sun".

Whether this recording was intended for Hendrix's planned late-1970 album, or was being saved for a grander project, is still open to conjecture. An August memo headed "Songs For The LP Straight Ahead" listed the following tracks: "Ezy Rider"/"Room Full Of Mirrors"/"Earth Blues Today"/"Valley Of Neptune"/"Cherokee Mist (Instr)"/"Freedom"/"Stepping Stone"/"Izabella"/"Astro Man"/"Drifter's Escape"/"Angel"/"Bleeding Heart"/"Burning Desire"/"Night Bird Flying"/"Electric Lady"/"Getting My Heart Back Together Again"/"Lover Man"/"Midnight Lightning"/"Heaven Has No Tomorrow"/"Send My Love To Linda"/"This Little Boy"/"Locomotion"/"Dolly Dagger"/"The New Rising Sun (Hey Baby)". Bearing in mind that a couple of these, like "Cherokee

Mist" and "Valley Of Neptune", dated back to 1968, and that "Getting My Heart Back Together Again" and "Lover Man" were variations on old themes ("Hear My Train A-Comin'" and "Rock Me Baby"), this double-album set was more an authoritative trawl through two years' worth of salvagable material rather than the consistently themed album Jimi dreamed of releasing. Once more, compromise was foremost in his mind — and it hurt.

Which is probably the reason why he stripped this listing down to the 16 tracks written on a tape box that same month. Now the forthcoming album looked like this: A: "Dolly Dagger"/"Night Bird Flying"/"Room Full Of Mirrors"/"Belly Button Window"/"Freedom". B: "Ezy Rider"/"Astro Man"/"Drifting"/"Straight Ahead". C: "Night Bird Flying" (again!)/"Drifter's Escape"/"Coming Down Hard On Me"/"Beginning"/"Cherokee Mist"/"Angel". (Those marked with an asterisk had been deleted by pen strokes.) This time, "Hey Baby" was nowhere to be seen.

**"I've turned full circle. I'm right back where I started. I've given this era of music everything, but I still sound the same. My music's the same, and I can't think of anything new to add to it in its present state."**

(Jimi Hendrix, September 1970)

To add to the confusion, Jimi also spent part of the summer working on an autobiographical suite titled "Black Gold". It was long thought to have been stolen, or even a figment of certain imaginations, but a cassette copy recently surfaced in Mitch Mitchell's collection. Apparently, the tape was one of six given to him by Jimi wrapped in a headband for safe keeping while they were making 'Rainbow Bridge' in Maui, Hawaii in July.

Only a few (asterisked) titles look familiar: "Suddenly November Morning"/"Drifting" (two verses)\*/"Captain Midnite"/"Local Commotion"/"Here Comes Black Gold"/"Stepping Stone"/"Little Red Velvet Room"/"The Jungle Is Waiting"/"Send My Love To Joan Of Arc"/"God Bless The Day"/"Black Gold"/"Machine Gun"/"Here Comes Black Gold (reprise)"/"Astro Man"\*

Hendrix aficionado Tony Brown, one of the few privileged to have heard the tape, quotes some lyrics from the title track as "Here comes Black Gold/Gather round young and old/He's going to be felt by the Timid and the Bold". It was Jimi's old fantasy of the universal peacemaker, which had initially fuelled the "First Rays" project. Perhaps "First Rays" was now so long-in-the-tooth, its material gradually incorporated into Jimi's sets and losing its identity, that he'd switched tack and "Black

Gold" could, after all, have been the repository of "what I've found out".

By the end of August, Hendrix re-entered Electric Lady, in order to complete work on "First Rays"/"Straight Ahead" or, according to Kathy Eberth, Mike Jeffery's assistant, a possible triple-LP titled "People, Hell And Angels". Further complicating the situation, Jimi was obliged to set aside material for a tie-in "Rainbow Bridge" soundtrack album, which took care of "Dolly Dagger", "Earth Blues" and "Pali Gap" (the latter, on "Voodoo Soup", really comes alive in full sensurround, sounding like the missing link between Fleetwood Mac's "Albatross" and Santana's version of "Black Magic Woman").

Other tracks that were finished, and thus likely candidates for the new album proper, included "Freedom", "Night Bird Flying", "Ezy Rider", "Room Full Of Mirrors" and the "Stepping Stone"/"Isabella" 45. Among those still in need of overdubs were "Angel" (one of his finest ballads, recorded in July), "Drifting" (also taped in July, the sound of reconciliation, not dissimilar to that later touted by David Gates and Bread) and "Straight Ahead".

No wonder that in his last interview, conducted days before his death, Jimi sounded down about his music. "I've turned full circle," he told Keith Altham. "I'm right back where I started. I've given this era of music everything, but I still sound the same. My music's the same, and I can't think of anything new to add to it in its present state." In the light of all the experimentation and sidetracking of the past two years, this was profoundly depressing. Then, as he often would, Hendrix looked at things another way. "I started thinking. Thinking about the future. Thinking that this era of music, sparked off by the Beatles, had come to an end. Something new has to come and Jimi Hendrix will be there."

"I want a big band. I don't mean three harps and 14 violins. I mean a big band full of competent musicians that I can conduct and write for. And with the music we will paint pictures of Earth and space, so that the listener can be taken somewhere."

On a roll, he continued: "It's so exciting, it's going to be an audio-visual thing that you sit down and plug into and really take in through your ears and eyes. I'm so happy, it's gonna be good."

Hitting emotional extremes tends to go hand in hand with artists marked by a unique vision. Hendrix was certainly one of them. But, aside from the mention of the visual aspects, Jimi had been saying this sort of thing for two years. There might have come a point where he stopped believing that "First Rays" or "Black Gold" or the potentially apocalyptic "People, Hell & Angels" might ever get made. His death on September 18th 1970 might well have been accidental, but his will to survive was certainly not as strong as it could have been. I get the feeling that his masterwork was not left on tape — it died with him, still free-floating in his head.

# TONAL records

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